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Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 3 of resolution 719 (1991) of 6 November 1991 in which the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it fully informed of further developments and to report on all aspects of the operations of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) before the expiry of the new mandate period and in particular to report within three months, taking account of any developments in the region which indicated that the present size of ONUCA or its future should be reconsidered.

2. During the period of just over two months since that resolution was adopted, ONUCA's command, composition and deployment have been as described in my report of 28 October 1991 (S/23171), except that, as foreseen in that report, the resources contributed by Germany have been withdrawn and replaced by a military medical unit contributed by Argentina and by a commercially hired aircraft. The Group's operations have also continued on the basis described in that report. The only incident worthy of note took place on 19 December 1991 when, on humanitarian grounds, ONUCA made helicopter support available to help the authorities of El Salvador and Honduras to recover the bodies of nine Honduran military personnel who died when the helicopter in which they were travelling strayed over the border into El Salvador and was shot down by combatants of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), who mistook it for an aircraft of the Armed Force of El Salvador. The Government of Honduras expressed to my predecessor its appreciation of this assistance.

3. Since my predecessor's report of 28 October 1991, there has been major progress in the negotiations on a comprehensive settlement to the armed conflict in El Salvador. In the "Act of New York" of 31 December 1991, the Government and the FMLN recorded that they had concluded a number of further agreements which, taken with those signed earlier in San José, Mexico and New York, would put a definitive end to the armed conflict in El Salvador. The text of this document has already been made available to the members of the Security Council as an annex to my report of 10 January 1992 (S/23402).

Intensive negotiations under the leadership of my Personal Representative for the Central American Peace Process, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, have since led to agreement on the two outstanding issues referred to in the Act of New York, thus clearing the way for signature of the final peace agreements in Mexico City on 16 January 1992.

4. In the "Observations" section of his report of 28 October 1991, my predecessor indicated that an early and successful conclusion to the peace process in El Salvador would make it necessary to reconsider ONUCA's future. He also referred to the cost of meeting the ever-growing demand for peace-making and peace-keeping activities by the United Nations and the widely held view that peace-keeping operations should be set up to do a specific task for a specific period and then be disbanded. My own report of 10 January 1992 contains details of the major additional tasks of verification which will now fall to the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) and of the resources which they will require. In these circumstances, I believe that the time has come for the Security Council to decide to terminate the mandate of ONUCA. The representatives in New York of the five countries in which ONUCA is deployed were informed on 2 January 1992 that it was my intention so to recommend to the Security Council.

5. Two of the five Governments have since conveyed observations to me on this matter. In a letter dated 6 January 1992, the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations stated that while his Government agreed that ONUCA's personnel and equipment should be transferred as quickly as possible to ONUSAL so that the latter could carry out the important new tasks assigned to it, Costa Rica requested that the ONUCA naval squadron, which is contributed by Argentina, should also be transferred to ONUSAL so that it could continue to maintain a watch in the Gulf of Fonseca. Costa Rica also thought it of great importance that ONUSAL should maintain a watch over Honduras' frontier with El Salvador in order to verify compliance with the security undertakings in the Esquipulas II Agreement. On 7 January 1992, the Foreign Minister of Honduras, in a meeting with the Chief Military Observer of ONUCA, expressed his authorities' view that there was still a need for United Nations verification of the Esquipulas II Agreements. He also expressed concern about the possible implications for stability in his country's border areas with El Salvador if certain elements in the latter were not to comply with the agreements reached.

6. It is entirely understandable that the Governments concerned should feel a certain unease at the proposed departure of ONUCA. The termination of a peace-keeping operation in which the parties have come to have confidence always gives rise to concerns of this kind. However, I believe that the considerations mentioned in paragraph 4 above must necessarily prevail in the present case.

7. I accordingly recommend that the Security Council decide to terminate ONUCA's operational mandate with effect from 17 January 1992 so as to enable me to proceed with the transfer of certain personnel and equipment from ONUCA

to ONUSAL and complete this deployment in El Salvador by 1 February 1992. If the Council approves this recommendation, administrative action will be instituted to close down the mission as quickly as possible after its mandate terminates.

8. In conclusion, I would like to pay a tribute to the Chief Military Observer of ONUCA, Brigadier-General Victor Suanzes Pardo (Spain), to his predecessors in command and to all military and civilian personnel who have served in ONUCA, for their great success in establishing this first large-scale peace-keeping operation of the United Nations in the Americas and for the contribution which they have made to the restoration of peace and stability in Central America.